DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 070 078 CS 200 246

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TITLE Speech Therapy and the Culturally Different Student.
PUB DATE Sep 72
NOTE 15p.; Portions of this paper were presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Assn. (80th, Honolulu, September 1972)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Conceptual Schemes; Cultural Awareness; Cultural Differences; Linguistic Theory; *Nonstandard Dialects; *Speech Pathology; *Speech Therapy

ABSTRACT

Educators and psychologists whose concern is to understand why a student does not succeed in school have held the view that speakers of nonstandard English are either nonverbal and, if verbal, highly ungrammatical, or so verbally destitute as to impair intellectual functioning. Linguists, on the other hand, view the language of subculture groups as fully developed, highly structured, rule governed systems which are simply different from standard English. Given this latter view, the resulting conceptual model for the speech therapist should include an ability to diagnose the speech characteristics of culturally different students, an understanding of their cultural backgrounds, and instructional procedures which make maximal use of the student's first language. This latter view also holds significant implications for the field of speech pathology: (1) it would seem more logical to change the professional title "speech therapist" to "speech specialist" in order to de-emphasize the remediation bias the title now carries; (2) work needs to be relevant to the language of the community being served; (3) new approaches are needed for the training of students in speech pathology; and (4) a vigorous program of recruitment of people from culturally different backgrounds needs to be established. (HS)

ED 070078

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CS 200 246

Abstract

Language is an important concern for the culturally different student when language of the subculture differs from that of the broader culture. This paper discusses the issue of whether the language of subcultural groups is deficient or whether it is in fact a different, but equally valid, language. The role of the speech therapist vis-a-vis culturally different students is considered. Finally, suggestions for change in the field of speech therapy are presented.

SPEECH THERAPY AND THE CULTURALLY DIFFERENT STUDENT [1]

Language is the primary medium through which a culture's perceptions of the universe are structured and through which its values, customs, and expectations are transmitted to its members. Likewise, it is through language that a group member identifies with his cultural heritage and communicates with those of his own racial, ethnic, social, or national background. Indeed, language and culture are so intimately related that our listeners make assumptions about our cultural background and socio-economic status simply by listening to us talk (Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, & Fillenbaum, 1960; Anisfeld, Bogo, & Lambert, 1962; Labov, 1964, 1966; Williams, 1970, 1971; Williams, Whitehead, & Miller, 1971).

Education and the values of the academic environment are transmitted via the language of the broader culture. When the language of the broader culture and that of a student's subculture are different, the student's task of functioning effectively within the educational system and of reconciling the difference between two cultures is intensified.

Historically, the mainstream culture has sought to assimilate culturally different groups by requiring that all people speak English--not just any brand of English, but Standard American English. The use of Standard English as a measure against which to judge the language of subcultural groups has lead to the notion of linguistic deprivation and has resulted in various remedial and compensatory teaching strategies (Labov, 1971a, 1971b; Williams, 1971; Yoder, 1971).

Recently, however, there has been a trend in certain sectors to view language of subcultural groups as different rather than deficient.

This paper will be concerned with three topics: deficit versus difference, the role of the speech therapist vis-a-vis culturally different students, and some suggestions which might be followed in the field of speech pathology in the future.

Deficit--difference

Researchers in the area of language tend to hold one of two views concerning language of culturally different groups. On the one hand, there are those who view language of subcultural groups as deficient, poorly developed, pathological, or immature (Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966; Bereiter, Engelmann, Osborn, & Reidford, 1966; Deutsch & associates, 1967; Deutsch, Katz, & Jensen, 1968). This group is made up primarily of psychologists and educators whose main concern is to understand why a student does not succeed in school. Language deficiency theorists would have us believe one or all of three things: that speakers of non-standard English are either 1) non-verbal, 2) if verbal, highly ungrammatical, or 3) so verbally destitute as to impair intellectual functioning in terms of concept formation and abstract thinking.

On the other hand, there are those who view language of subcultural groups as fully developed, highly structured, rule governed systems which simply are different from Standard American English (Baratz, 1968, 1969a, 1969b, 1970, 1971; Wolfram, 1970). This group is made up primarily of linguists, siciolinguists, and psycholinguists whose main concern is the structure, development, and use of language. These theorists start from

a different set of assumptions about dialects and language:

1) All languages or dialects are adequate communicative systems for the members of the language community that they serve.
2) All languages are systematic and ordered.
3) Language is learned in the context of the community in which it is spoken.
4) All languages are equally capable of expressing conceptualizations, abstractions, and logical operations, but the mode for the particular conceptualizing may differ tremendously between language systems.

(Wolfram, 1970)

Thus, when the argument is made that children from culturally different backgrounds are non-verbal, the socio-linguist points out that experimental data is frequently misinterpreted due to lack of knowledge of language as a system and the importance of the relationship between language use and the social setting. For example, the experimental situation, the examiner and his language, the materials, and the responses required are often more appropriate to the middle class child, and the resultant "non-verbalness" is a defensive maneuver employed by the child in what he perceives to be a threatening situation (Labov, 1971). Indeed, when culturally different children are viewed in their own environments, it becomes obvious that there is no lack of verbal stimulation or verbal behavior. In fact, facility with language is a pre-requisite for entry into many peer groups and competitive verbal games such as "playing the dozens", "copping a plea", "rapping", "jiving", "sounding", and "louding" are part of the black youth's repertoire. Further, it is interesting to note that language

use is in fact a determinant of peer group status among lower class blacks. William Stewart (1969) describes the shifting of dialect at about age seven or eight as being one signal of the shift in status from "small boy" to "big boy" in the informal social structure of the peer group.

Likewise, when the claim is made that such utterances by black students as "he be workin" (or in Appalachian speech "he's a-workin"), or "50 cent", or "John cousin" are examples of immature, deviant, ungrammatical language behavior, the linguist who has studied the structure of black language knows that these utterances represent highly grammatical, systematic applications of syntactic rules: "he be workin", meaning he is working all of the time, is an expression of continuous action or state of being through a grammatical rule; "50 cent" employs a rule which allows for the deletion of the plural s marker in the presence of a quantifier "50"; and "John cousin" is an example of possession being indicated by the contiguous relationship of the words.

The third argument which is often made is that the so-called "poorly developed" language of blacks and poverty groups is illogical and does not support abstract, conceptual thinking. The lack of the words "not" and "if" in black speech is frequently used as evidence for such an argument. Linguists, however, have demonstrated that negation in black language is expressed by use of the double negative, e.g., "I don't got no book", which is no less abstract, no less logical, and no less the concept of negation than "I don't have a book".

In the case of the absence of the word "if", it has been shown that the concept of uncertainty in black language is expressed by a word order change. Thus, "I don't know if John can come over tonight" becomes "I

don't know can John come over tonight".

Further support for the argument that the language of cultural subgroups does not fascilitate abstract thought is drawn from the work of Basil Bernstein (1960, 1966, 1971) who studied the language of the middle and lower social classes in England. He distinguished what he termed "restricted" and "elaborated" codes. In the restricted code of the lower class, meaning is more implicit and context bound while that of the elaborated code of the middle class is more explicit and context free. Thus the user of the elaborated code puts himself in the listener's position, takes little for granted, and makes explicit for the listener the meanings which he is realizing through language. Bernstein's findings have been interpreted to mean that the "restricted" code of the lower class is not conducive to analytic or abstract thought processes. Baratz (1969b) and Labov (1971a) maintain that Bernstein has really documented a difference in superficial form (style) rather than differences in specific processes (language abstraction) and that restricted and elaborated code users are not significantly different in their logic of reasoning or ability to think abstractly. Frederick Williams (1971, p.393) suggests that perhaps what we are seeing is not the inability of the lower class student to produce the elaborated code when asked a question, but the willingness of the middle class student to supply more information than the question requires.

Differences in phonology, syntax, and style do exist--but a difference must not be assumed to be the same as a deficiency. From a linguistic point of view, to label a language as illogical, undeveloped, or unable to support abstract reasoning is to misunderstand language as a system and to

ignore the sociolinguistic factors which determine a community's use of language. Furthermore, since language is an integral part of personality, culture, and identity, to label what is a perfectly workable, socially approved system within a cultural group as "deviant", "destitute", or "deprived" is to devalue those things which are not only important but necessary for a positive self image. An attack on the value of a person's language is ultimately an attack on his pride and self esteem.

A less traumatic and more productive way to deal with students from different language backgrounds is to view their dialect or language as a fully developed, equally valid, but different system.

The role of the speech therapist

Speech therapists have traditionally been trained to diagnose and treat disorders of speech, disorders of hearing, and disorders of language most usually associated with brain damage, emotional problems, and mental retardation. This conceptual model provides a framework for viewing speech as deficient for either functional or organic reasons and leads quite reasonably to the treatment strategies of therapy, remediation, and correction. For persons belonging to subcultural groups for whom Standard American English is not the first language but who have learned another valid language system, this conceptual model of deficiency--remediation does not apply.

Thus the first job of the speech therapist when he receives referrals of culturally different students is to be able to diagnose the characteristics of the students speech which are different and those which are deviant. In order to make such distinctions, he must be familiar with the first

language of the student. For example, the therapist must determine whether the omission of a final sound is due to a grammatical rule (50 cent_, as in the example above), a phonological rule (chil_ for child in black speech, an example of the phonological rule allowing deletion of the final consonant when a word ends in a consonant cluster), or an articulatory error.

In addition, the speech therapist should be familiar with the cultural background of the student so that he doesn't misinterpret such culturally determined behaviors as the tendency of the Chicano to look down when talking to an authority figure as a lack of interest or sign of disrespect, the Native American's reticence to speak as a lack of verbal ability, or the Oriental's habitually soft voice as a pathologically restricted range of volume.

Furthermore, the speech therapist has an ethical responsibility not to misrepresent himself to his students. He must make absolutely clear that what he is teaching is Standard American English, although not advocating it as a replacement system. He then must let the student decide for himself whether he wants to learn the dialect of the mainstream culture. If the student elects to learn Standard American English, the therapist must use procedures which make maximal use of the student's first language. For example, one procedure is the use of contrastive analysis which makes the student aware of similarities and differences between his language and the new language system.

In addition, the therapist must define his goals in terms of the needs of the students as the student sees them. For example, a traditional final step in speech therapy is carry-over of the newly learned skill to everyday conversational speech situations. In working with

culturally different students, this may not be an appropriate goal. Use of Standard American English in his home environment might serve to alienate him from his own family and friends and create conflicts which force a choice between his own cultural background and the culture represented by the educational system.

Trends and suggestions

The relatively new view of the adequacy and systematic nature of all language proposed by linguists and the resulting new conceptual model for speech therapy with the culturally different hold significant implications for the field of speech pathology.

First, and perhaps basic, is our professional title--speech therapist, speech correctionist, speech pathologist. With the change in basic assumptions regarding language differences versus deficiencies, it would seem more logical to call ourselves "speech specialists" or "communication specialists" in order to de-emphasize the remediation bias our title now carries.

Second, we must work vigorously to make our work appropriate to the language community being served in terms of language evaluations, what is taught, the situation in which it is taught, and the materials to be used In order to ensure such appropriateness, a massive program of research is needed. Research should be directed toward defining the linguistic structures of cultural groups, formulating new norms which are culturally valid for diagnostic purposes, discovering the needs and aspirations of a given language community, understanding the complicated interaction of speech, language, reading, writing, and auditory functioning, and

acquiring insight into the vitally important role of social context to speech and language. New tests of language functioning, articulation, and auditory discrimination as well as new teaching strategies which are culturally relevant and valid in their use with cultural subgroups should emerge from such a research effort.

Third, there is a need for new approaches to the training of students in the field of speech therapy. Training in linguistics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics to develop an understanding of the nature and use of language in a speech community is crucial if we are to work effectively with culturally different students. Indeed, the development of a whole new curriculum and even a new certificate of clinical competence should be considered for the speech specialist who wishes to work with culturally different students.

Fourth, a vigorous program of recruitment of people from culturally different backgrounds for work in the field, in research, and in the training of students should be pursued. It is essential that adequate funding be made available to people who are recruited into our field.

If we are to be part of an educational system whose avowed goal is the development of human resources and realization of human potential, it is our responsibility as professionals to offer the culturally different the benefit of our services in a way which honors, respects, and allows the continuation of their dignity and culture.

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Footnote

1. Portions of this paper were presented at the 80th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Honolulu, September, 1972.